

The Future of Work

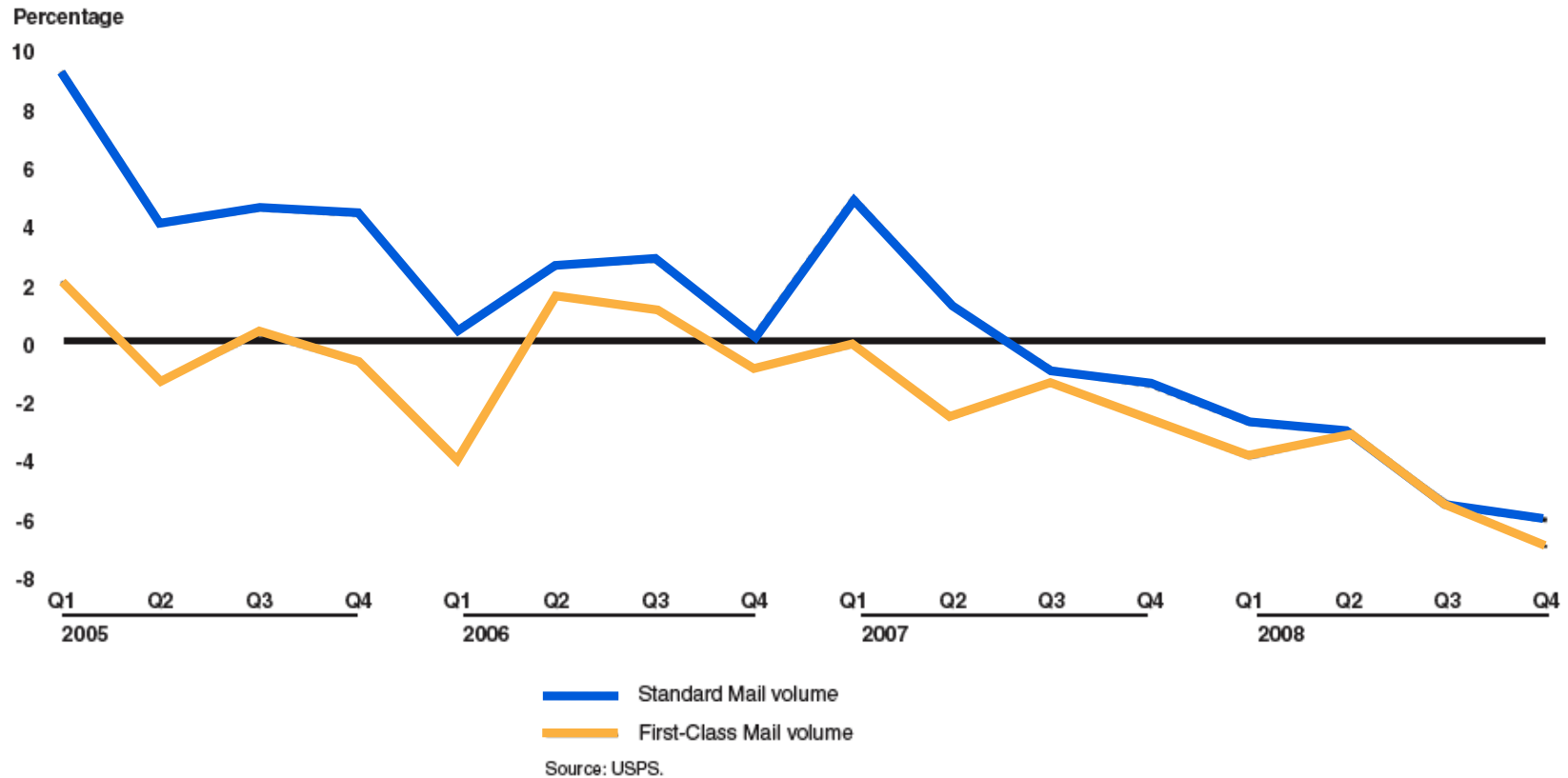
Interaction Design
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Table of Contents

Problem Statement	2
Inspiration	
Mail in the Past, Present and Future	3-4
Process	
Exploring	
Making a Movie	
Brainstorming (Individual)	
Interviews/Observations	
Brainstorming (Together)	5-12
Third Place Analysis	13
Early Sketches/Renderings	14
Case Studies	15
Design	
What is c-mail?	
The Components	
Where Could c-mail be?	16-18
Story Board	19-21
Community Message Board	22
User Group	23
Business	24
Possibilities	
Sustainability	
Public Art	25

Problem Statement



The Challenge

In recent years, mail volume has been steadily decreasing. Technologies such as e-mail and text messaging have replaced carried mail as the primary form of written communication. But even in a world where a person can reach another person by the touch of a button more and more people these days admit to feelings of isolation.

Perhaps the solution to this problem is not to rely on newer forms of technology, but embrace and restructure existing methods to better connect our communities. Herein lies our design challenge.

How can we bring people together in new ways with an integration of old and new forms of technology?

Our design revolutionizes an archaic, monotonous, and necessary system and changes it into a warm, inviting and approachable experience.



Mail in the Past

Communication by means of transporting written documents has been performed since the beginning of civilization. At that time mail was the only geographical connector for people over long distances.

Having access to mail allowed people to stay connected despite their location. Even though this was a timely process, the mail would still arrive despite rain, sleet, or snow. This characteristic of having the mail symbolized the structure of civilization and order.

Mail in the Present

The use of mail is still fundamental. Delivery still occurs daily. The luxury of which is sustained by the junk mail sales. Although the majority of the mail we receive is junk, we continue to love receiving mail because of its sentimental value.

It is a universal communicator; anyone can send a letter whether they are old, young, rich or poor. But our precious system is in danger. In the past year alone the United States Postal Service experienced a decline of 9 billion pieces of mail.



Mail in the Future?

The mail volume will continue to steadily decrease. Although it is decreasing, elimination is unlikely due to its necessity. Conversely the number of potential tech savvy users are increasing, and with them a broad range of opportunities. It is important to take advantage of these opportunities in order to connect this archaic system with newer forms of technology.

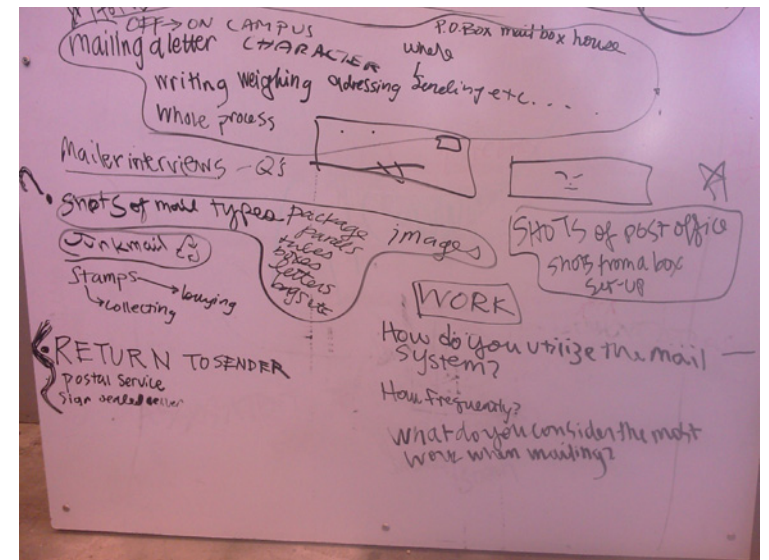


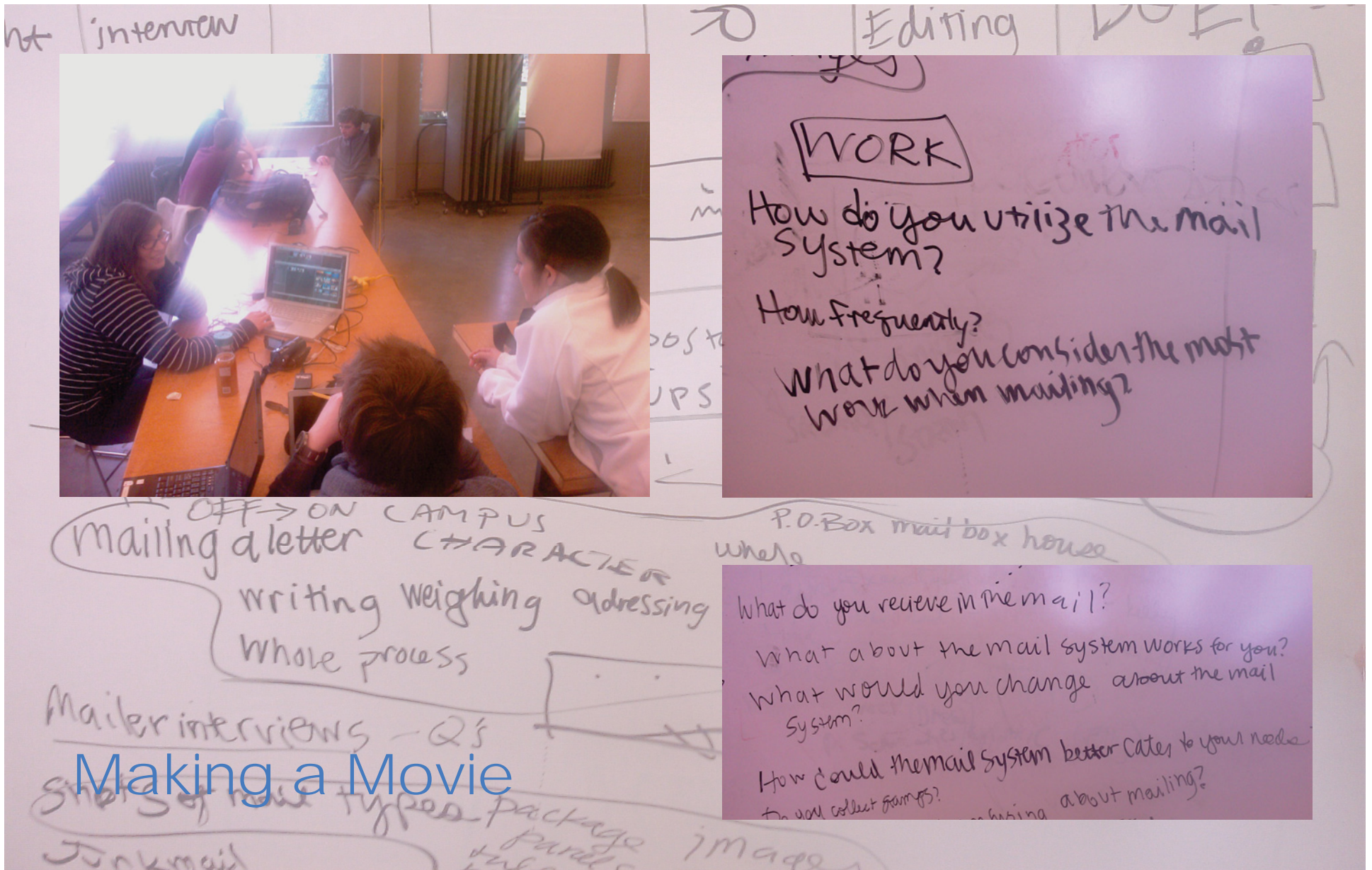


Exploring

We first began our project by individually identifying all the areas of work and the activities we most enjoyed in our lives. Afterwards, we wrote them all down on post its and combined them together in a giant collaborative brainstorm. By doing this activity we hoped to identify a way we could merge both work and play together when we selected a topic.

At our first group session we immediately decided to eliminate chores, which ironically we decided to base our entire project on. Going to the post office is one chore many people despise. It was a universal type of work for all involved. From the users who utilize the post to the postal carriers that make daily deliveries possible, everyone is working in some manner to make the system run.





Making a Movie



Observations

Discovering the context of community interactions was crucial to creating a system based on an emotive form of communication. We conducted our research by observing people at the post office sending and receiving messages. Making sure to take note of their expressed mood at the time.

In addition to observing customers we followed several postal carriers along their routes and interviewed them about their experiences delivering mail.

As a group, we went to a variety of community spaces to better understand the local spaces and culture. During the project we all became more invested members in our community due to the large amount of time we spent conversing with neighbors and strangers. Every community gathering was an opportunity to explore neighbor-to-neighbor interactions.





Sophie

“The only thing I don’t like is to be in line at the post office because most of the time there always a lot of people there and you have to wait.”

“...I’ve been sending cards and small boxes and they just never arrived not one of them.”

“...and you have no idea where it is... it’s not one time it’s all the time. Where is this mail, you know, where is it?”

Interviews

Understanding user difficulties with the existing USPS system was an aspect we took into consideration. We talked with friends, family, colleagues, people sending letters and parcels, and postal carriers to achieve greater understanding of their specific qualms with the mail. These are excerpts from some of the many interviews we conducted.

Interviews and Observation



Stephanie

“Occasionally we get mail from people we really want to hear from like friends and family.”

“I have to drive to get to the post office...it’s not that close to me. If I have a package for example that I have to mail.”

“You still can’t get around a large parcel you still have to mail that you can’t send it through the internet.”

“I don’t leave mail out for the postal carrier very often anymore because of security.”



Anonymous

“I’d have to say addressing the mail is the most work.”

“I am not a huge fan of third class...whatever class junk mail is. I would just as soon not get a lot of that. If I could change the system, I would probably make more restrictions on vendors who send that kind of stuff.”

“You know, other than that I think it works pretty well actually. (Referring to the postal system) It works amazingly well.”

Interviews and Observation



Anonymous
Mail Carrier

“Letters are pre sorted in order of the route. Sorting is the most hectic part.”

“On average a route is 500 to 600 deliveries”

“The myth about mail carriers getting bit often is very true. I’ve been bit about five times.”

“I like being out side. It makes it interesting”

“Sometimes you’re carrying 40 pounds of mail and going up 20 flights of stairs”

“You get to know families, being a part of the community is nice.”

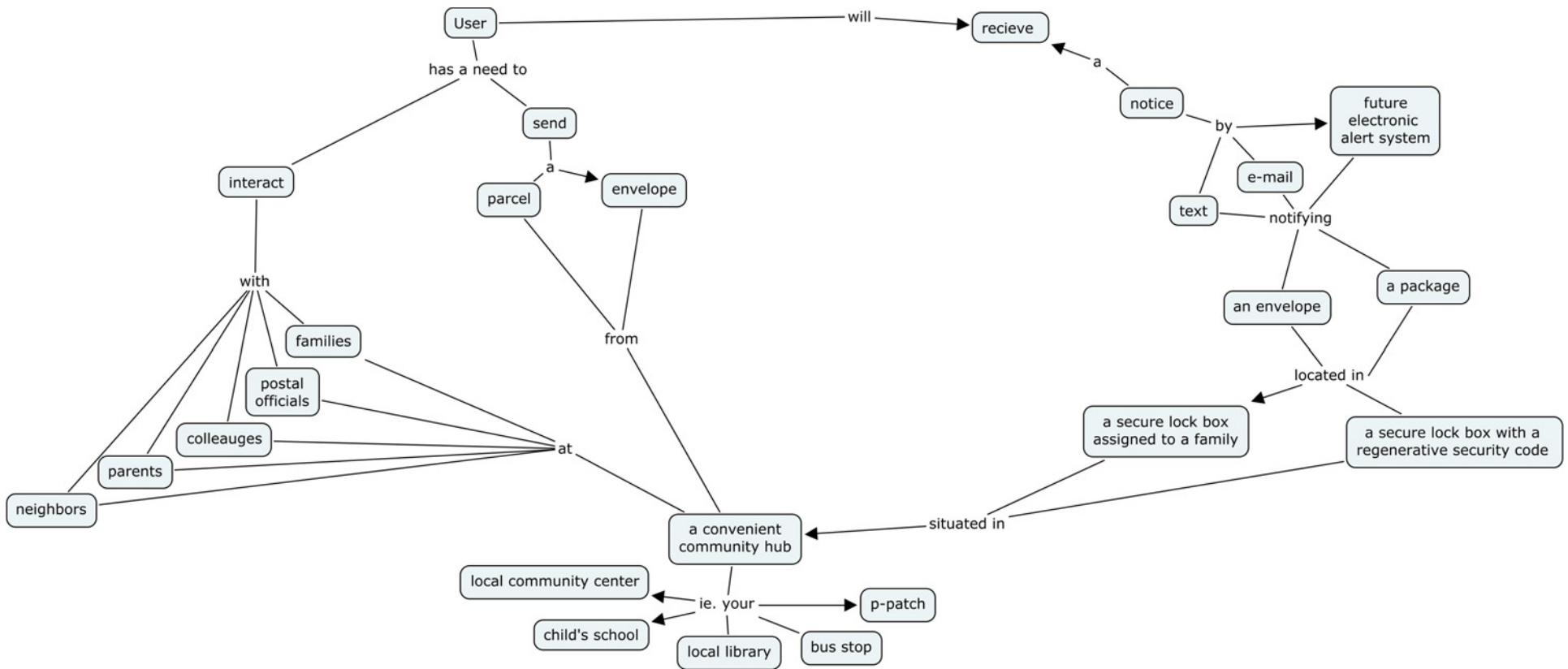


Janet

“I noticed that when computers came in we thought there would be no more paper, and I have just as much or more paper.

I think as long as there is a desire to communicate one on one with people in a way they can remember and keep that piece of paper...

...as long as there are books and words of kindness that there will be mail.”



The Mail Map

We collaborated to create a map with all of our combined brainstorm responses. We noticed that mail was no longer the center of the brainstorm. Most of our ideas and notions of mail were flowing from the community section of our brainstorm map. This is where we found the second component for our project. It was then decided we would design a way for our current mail system to become more imbedded in the community.

We then began to think about all the potential interactions that could occur at our new community mail location. Besides the possible face to face interactions and activities users can experience at our mail areas we wanted to explore the interactions users would experience with the mail facility itself. This led to breaking down the steps that would be required for example, to send a letter, package, or even buy stamps.



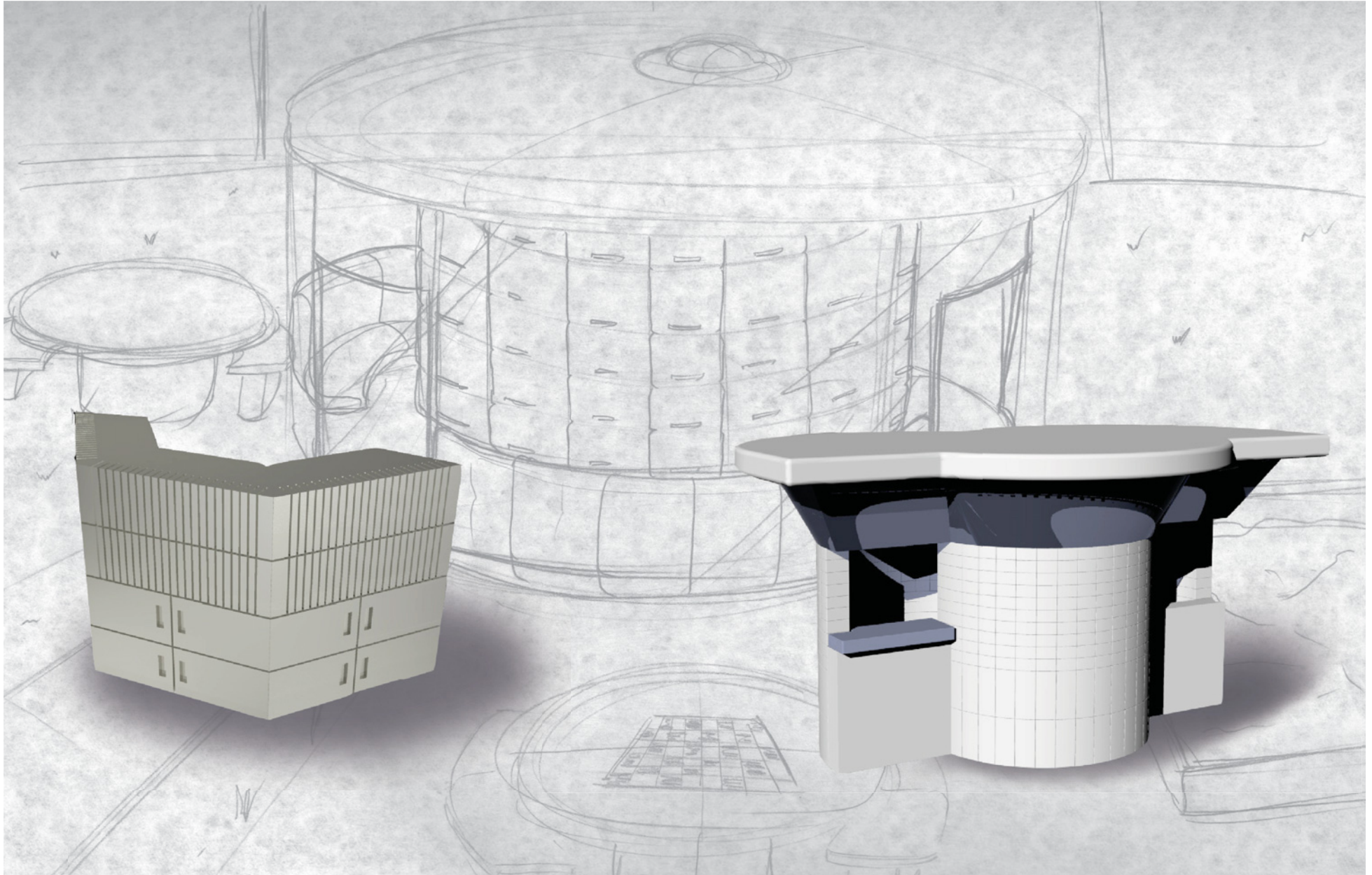
What is a “Third Place”

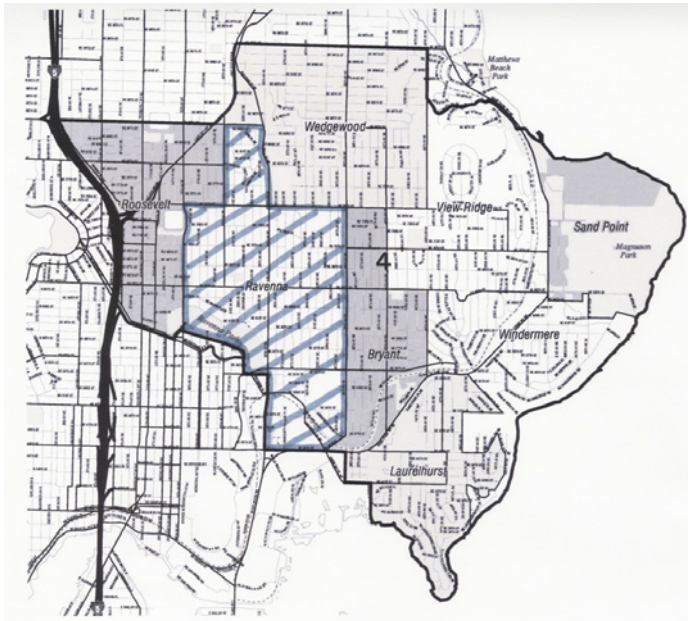
“The third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work.”

- Sociologist, Ray Oldenburg
(Author of *The Great Good Place*, 1989)

The social experience in third places are meant to be relaxing, inviting and accessible to all members of a community. They “function as a neighborhood living room” where one can figuratively put their feet up and relax. It is this type of environment that we decided to incorporate into our design.

Early Sketches/Renderings

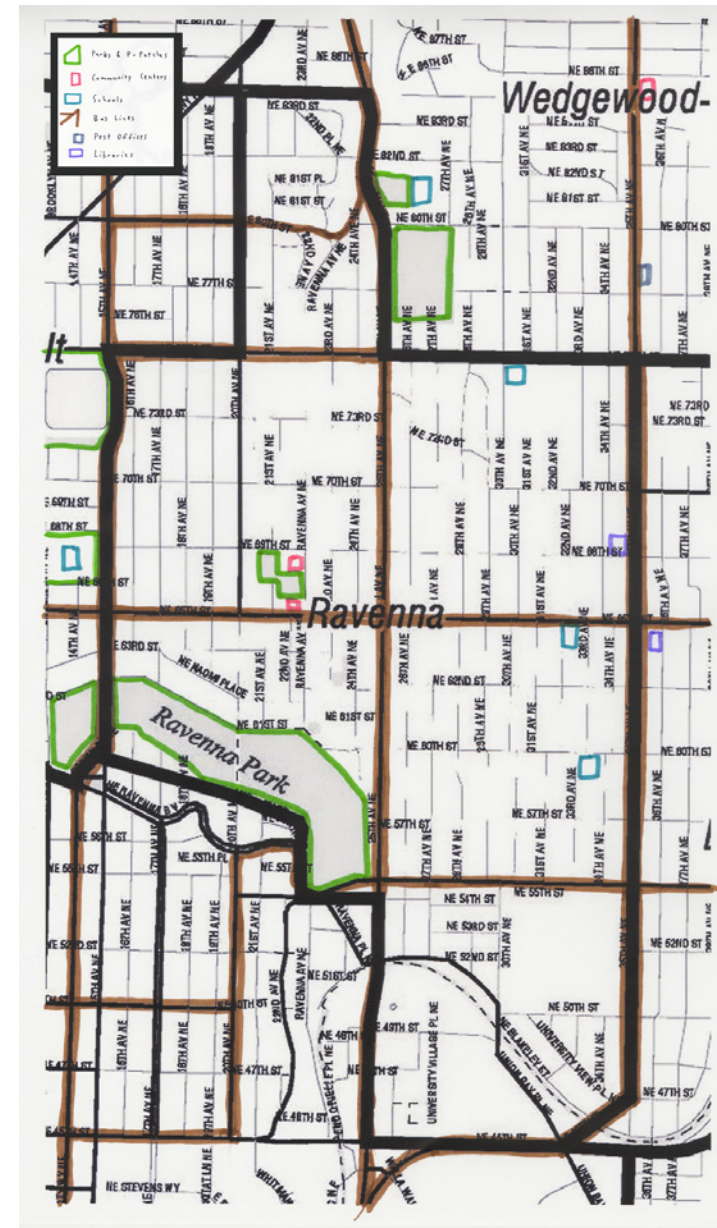




Ravenna and Ballard

The neighborhoods we became most familiar with during the project were Ravenna and Ballard. When we first began connecting mail to community spaces we utilized Ravenna as a case study for potential c-mail hub locations for c-mail hubs. We found there were numerous active neighborhood spaces that could potentially house our new mail system.

Ballard also provided an excellent example of a neighborhood with strong community character and connections. Exploring the farmer's market, local businesses, parks and libraries provided further insight as to how we could achieve a third place and integrate our design into existing urban spaces. Watching so many community members start dialogues and discussions in these communal spaces provided examples of human interactions that could occur with our design.





What is C-mail?

C-mail is our transformation of the mail system that allows this form of communication to move into the future while retaining the qualities we have grown to love.

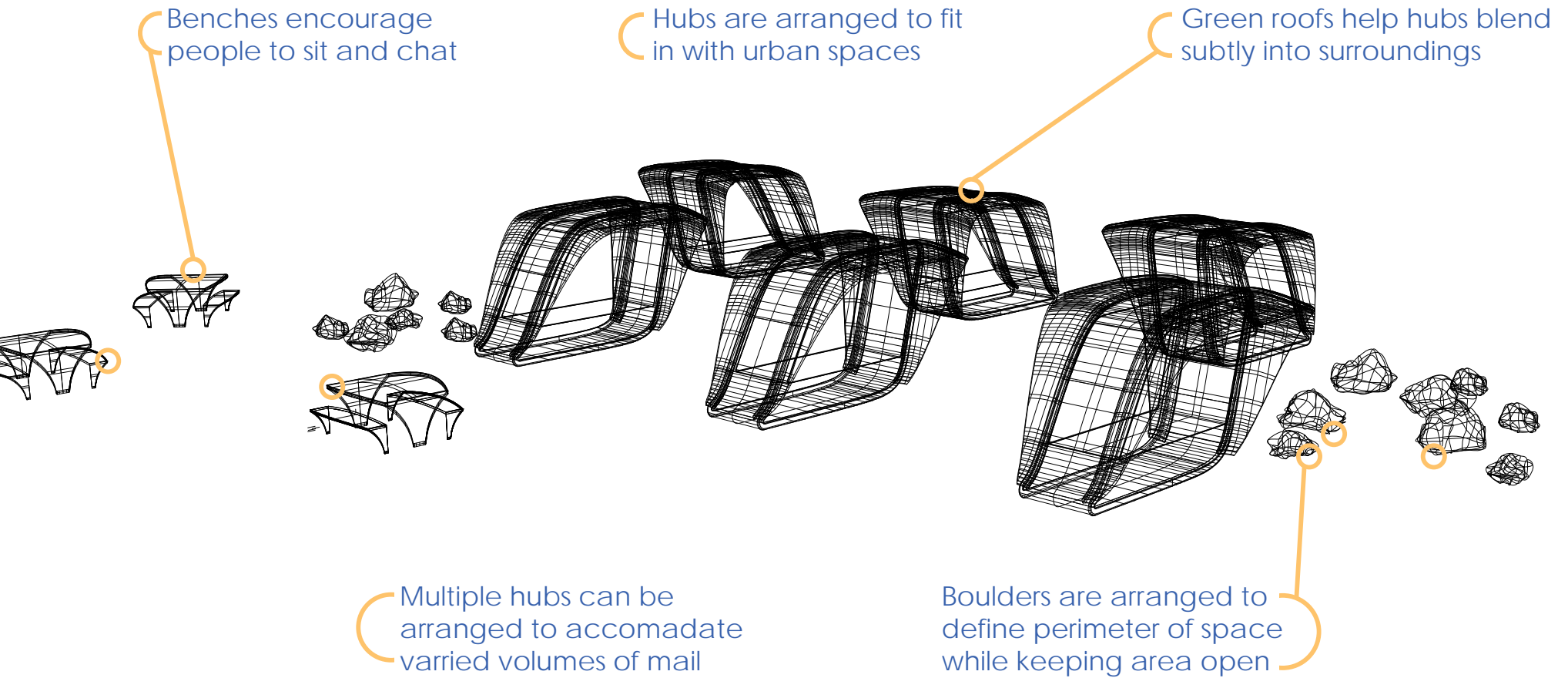
It brings together the aspects of tangible communication, human interaction and technology by providing a facility to allow community interactions to happen.

Letters are a form of communication that are more emotional and personal than a text message, or e-mail therefore the method should exemplify these qualities.

C-mail places mail directly within the community. Hubs are located at centralized locations to facilitate the sending and receiving of mail.

Our design integrates current forms of technology such as text notification and smart key access to revitalize the system. The c-mail spaces themselves are neutral areas to increase user comfort with the system, develop community flow through the space and enhance the overall design.

Design



Benches encourage people to sit and chat

Hubs are arranged to fit in with urban spaces

Green roofs help hubs blend subtly into surroundings

Multiple hubs can be arranged to accommodate varied volumes of mail

Boulders are arranged to define perimeter of space while keeping area open

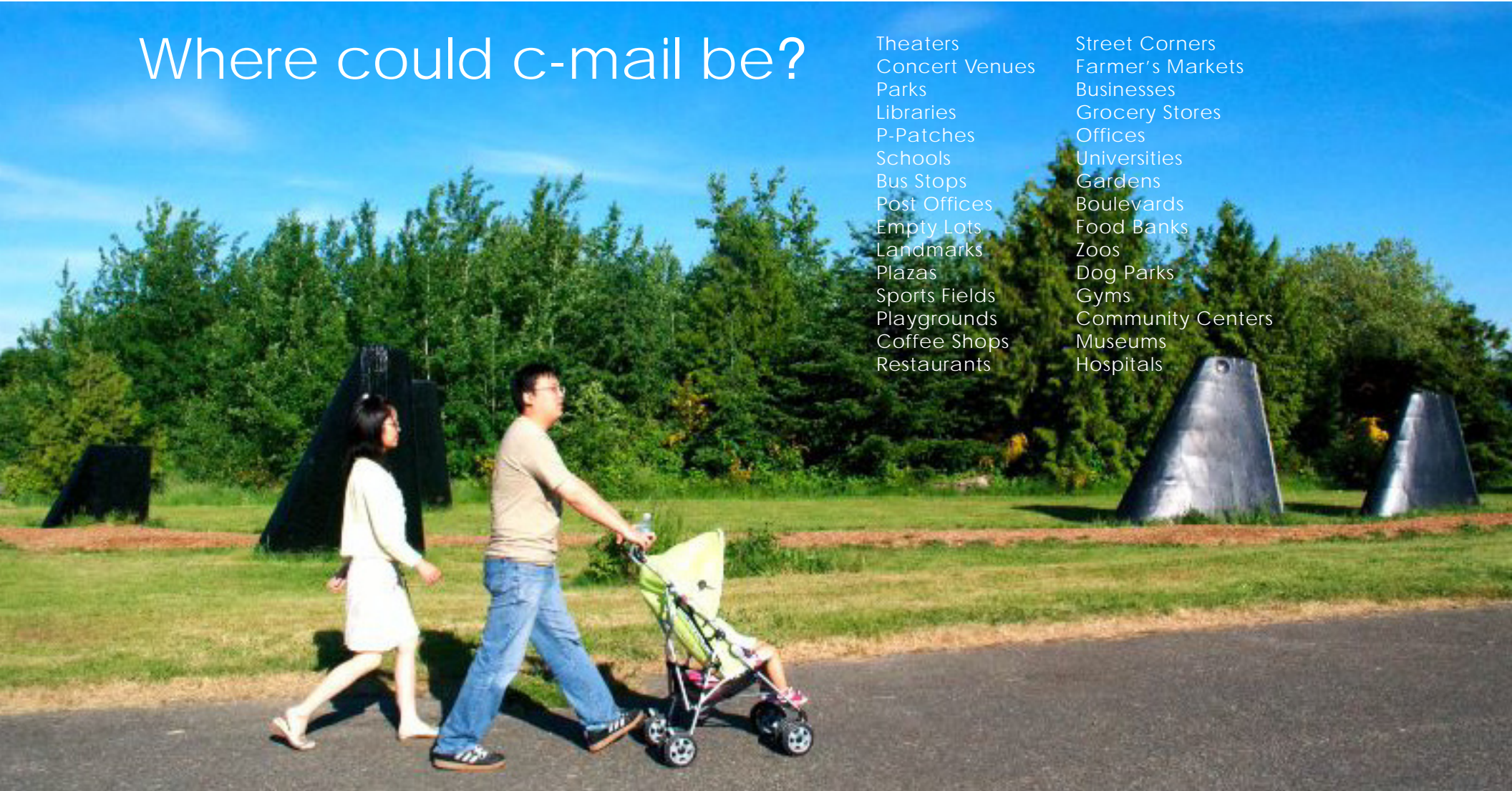
The Components

The units are modular to accommodate different community spaces and user volumes. Natural features, such as boulders, are an unobtrusive barrier to allot space for users to congregate for activities such as community meetings, musical performances, or chatting. Green roofs allow the hubs to blend into the surroundings and promote a community focus on sustainability.

Where could c-mail be?

Theaters
Concert Venues
Parks
Libraries
P-Patches
Schools
Bus Stops
Post Offices
Empty Lots
Landmarks
Plazas
Sports Fields
Playgrounds
Coffee Shops
Restaurants

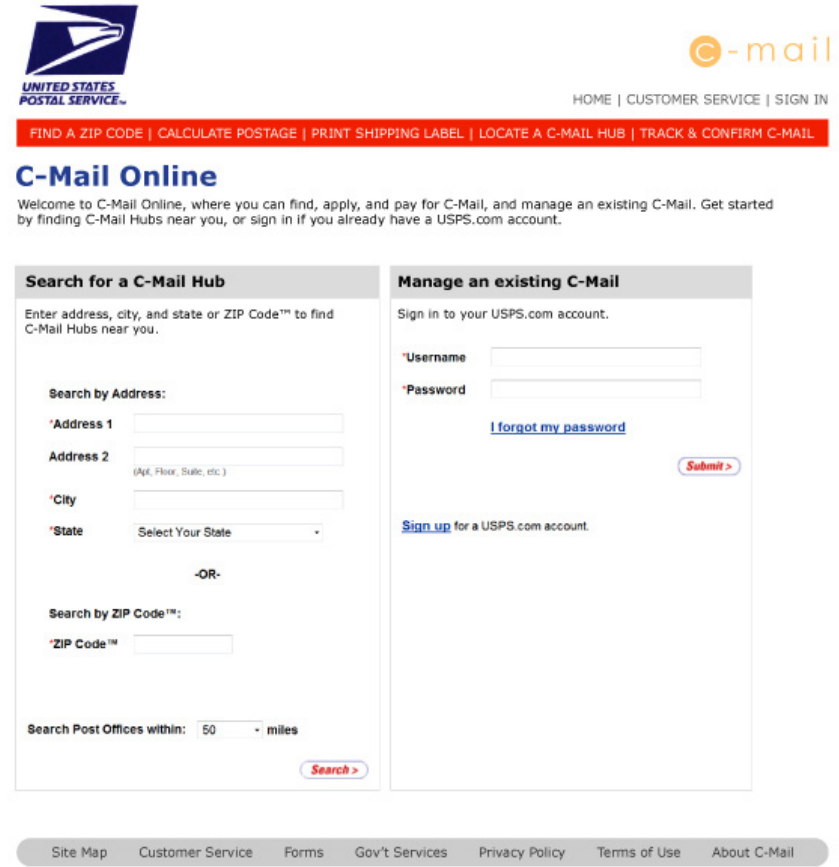
Street Corners
Farmer's Markets
Businesses
Grocery Stores
Offices
Universities
Gardens
Boulevards
Food Banks
Zoos
Dog Parks
Gyms
Community Centers
Museums
Hospitals





Step 1

To use c-mail users must first register for an account online and select the hub of their choice.



C-Mail Online

Welcome to C-Mail Online, where you can find, apply, and pay for C-Mail, and manage an existing C-Mail. Get started by finding C-Mail Hubs near you, or sign in if you already have a USPS.com account.

Search for a C-Mail Hub

Enter address, city, and state or ZIP Code™ to find C-Mail Hubs near you.

Search by Address:

*Address 1

Address 2
(Apt, Floor, Suite, etc.)

*City

*State

-OR-

Search by ZIP Code™:

*ZIP Code™

Search Post Offices within: miles

Manage an existing C-Mail

Sign in to your USPS.com account.

*Username

*Password

[I forgot my password](#)

[Sign up](#) for a USPS.com account.

Step 2

The criteria for choosing a hub can be based on where the user works, where they drop off their children for extra curricular activities or the location nearest their home.



Step 3

When a package or letter has arrived at the selected hub, an electronic notification will be sent immediately by text message, e-mail or another means.



Step 4

The user then commutes to their hub and unlocks their assigned mailbox with a smart key card, distributed by USPS, or simply by waving their registered phone in front of the mailbox.



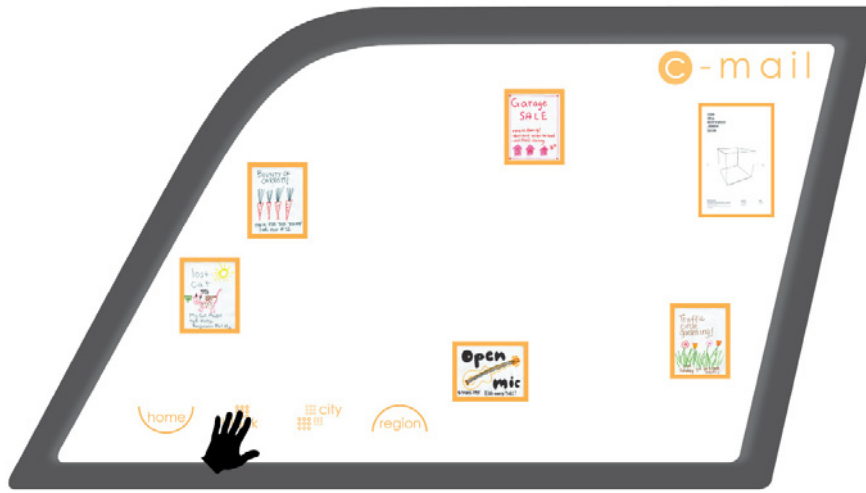
Step 5

Users would also be able to send packages with either a self-automated machine or with the assistance of a c-mail hub teller.



The hubs also feature message boards that post personalized home pages for the hub where they are located.

With these message boards users could also access community postings organized by block, city, or region.



The Message Board

Facilitating community communication plays a key role in our design and provides further cues to the user to interact with the c-mail spaces.

Currently, many community hot spots already contain a message board to promote community events.

Our board takes this method of communication to the next level by allowing users to see events by block, neighborhood, city, and region.

The organization of this c-mail feature allows users to more effectively scan through events to find activities that suit their needs.





User Group

C-mail will continue to be a universal system. One of the marks of civilization has always been the post. It arrives in a reliable manner and allows anyone to communicate without technological or geographical limitations. When post offices are shut down in rural areas it cuts people off from the rest of world and limits the basic methods with which they exchange information.

Our system will be accessible to all users, taking into consideration the necessary accommodations for the elderly and disabled and nomadic users. They will be given the ability to register for door to door delivery.

Cost Efficiency

In our model, the projection of the future stipulates that companies will be forced to stop to sending junk mail due to environmental impacts. Government policies will change to prohibit the sending of excessive junk mail.

Currently, 44% of mail is thrown away unopened and there are many ways for people to register to reduce the amount of junk mail they receive. The method of disposing this standard mail amounts to \$370 million dollars when it isn't recycled.

To replenish the deficit created by the lack of junkmail sales, we will implement a program to keep our design financially feasible. By including businesses as potential mail hubs we are able to further connect the user to spaces that are already frequented.

An additional bonus of including commercial practices is the possibility of aiding small or local businesses grow and prosper. By providing them access to mail hub home pages, businesses will be able to take a more active role in their communities by organizing events and also improve their services by being invested in the community.





Sustainability

With the implementation of c-mail hubs, door-to-door delivery will cease to exist. Consequently, delivery routes will shrink and there will no longer be a necessity for a large number of mail trucks. The incorporation of a Flex-Drive system could be a solution to the excess number of vehicles.



Public Art

Creating an identity for the mail hub as a place of community gathering will rely significantly on the inclusion of public art. To increase users' ease with the space and encourage play permanent playable art installations will be utilized. Other ways to increase creative expression include utilizing the space for concerts or outdoor movies.

Thank You

